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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND HEALTH MONTHLY - DEC
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¶1. (U) Summary: Environment, Science, Technology and Health Monthly
Update for December 2009, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Islamabad,
Pakistan.

Topics covered:

- Low HPV Prevalence among Karachi Women
- AIDS Therapy Centers in Pakistan
- Pakistan to Formally Enter Antarctic Treaty System
- Patients Feel Budget Strain at Holy Family Hospital
- PARC Chairman Supports Organic Farming Practices
- \$2 Million for Pakistan Wetlands Program in 2010

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Low HPV Prevalence among Karachi Women
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¶2. (U) A population-based survey of HPV (human papillomavirus) found
a very low prevalence of the sexual transmitted disease in Karachi.
Over 900 women residing in Orangi Town in Karachi district
participated in a collaborative survey conducted by the Aga Khan
University Hospital (AKUH), the French International Agency for
Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Sindh Government Qatar Hospital
(SGQH) in Orangi.

¶3. (U) The study was the first large-scale population-based survey
on HPV infection in Pakistan. The survey results show that fewer
than 3 percent of women in Orangi have HPV; however, due to
"socio-cultural constraints" unmarried women were not included in
the study.

¶4. (U) A senior instructor and epidemiologist at Aga Khan University
Hospital, Dr. Syed Ahsan Raza, described the low HPV prevalence in
Karachi as "striking" compared to levels seen in other countries
surveyed by the IARC, including Nepal (8.6 percent), Tamil Nadu,
India, (17 percent), and China (15-18 percent in three provinces).
"Given that the survey was conducted in one of the largest cities of
Pakistan and in an area where there is representation of different
ethnic groups, it is reasonable to believe that the HPV prevalence
is not as high as in other parts of Asia," said Dr. Raza.

¶5. (U) At the moment, no cervical screening program exists in
Pakistan, nor is there any data on HPV infection in the general
population. Little information is available on HPV-associated
cervical cancer in the country. The study points out that past

public awareness programs on sexually transmitted infections in Pakistan have been hampered by the social stigma attached to discussing female sexuality. Even in high-risk groups, women are hesitant to undergo regular gynecological examination or medical check-ups.

¶16. (U) According to the findings, a total of seventeen different HPV types were identified, with HPV 16 ranking as the most common type observed in the study. Higher levels of HPV positivity were observed in working women who have had two or more sexual partners, women who are 10 or more years younger than their husbands, and in women whose husbands have extramarital affairs or are absent from home more than seven nights a month. Higher HPV incidence was also found among illiterate women and women who were separated or divorced.

¶17. (U) Just over 43% of women participating in the study reported using contraceptives.

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AIDS Therapy Centers in Pakistan
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¶18. (U) According to National AIDS Program Manager Hassan Zaheer, there are only 5,000 reported cases of HIV/AIDS in Pakistan, but the Ministry of Health estimates there are upward of 95,000 HIV positive people in the country. AIDS awareness in Pakistan is narrow and, among the limited number of people aware of the disease, the stigma of AIDS is strong.

¶19. (U) However, there are some signs that this stigma is lessening. In collaboration with the NWFP AIDS Control Program, the World Health Organization (WHO) established a treatment center in Peshawar in 2005 for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. According to those running the antiretroviral therapy center, the facility has helped

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educate area residents about the disease and the number of those seeking therapy has risen steadily since the center opened in 2005. In 2005 the center received 35 patients, while in 2009 they received ¶136.

¶10. (U) In honor of World AIDS Day, the federal and provincial governments announced the opening of five new AIDS therapy centers. These new centers will be established in the province with the largest number of HIV positive residents (Sindh) and the province most affected by conflict (NWFP).

¶11. (U) In Sindh, where between 45,000 and 50,000 people are believed to be HIV positive, only 2,951 people have been registered with the Sindh AIDS Control Program (SCAP) and only 272 are being provided with treatment. Sindh officials have established two facilities to help HIV positive people in the province and hope to open a third in the first months of 2010.

¶12. (U) SCAP Manager, Dr. Mohammad Nasir Jalbani, said that counseling, testing and antiretroviral therapy were being provided at two government hospitals in Karachi - Civil Hospital and Qatar Hospital. These centers particularly want to reach women infected with the HIV virus in hopes of preventing the transmission of the virus to newborns. The third center in Sindh will be undertaken with support from UNICEF and is planned for Larkana, where HIV prevalence has been on the rise.

¶13. (U) The federal government also plans to establish additional counseling and testing centers in NWFP early in 2010, starting with centers in the Saidu Group of Hospitals in Swat and in the District Headquarters Hospital in Daggar, Buner.

¶14. (U) According to Dr. Mohammad Rafiq, Health and Nutrition Officer of UNICEF for NWFP and FATA, many people in the area are unwilling to undergo testing for HIV/AIDS because of the social taboos associated with the ailment and the decision to establish these centers in the conflict-torn districts was meant to encourage people, especially women, to come forward for voluntary counseling and testing. Those who test positive for HIV/AIDS at the centers

will be transported to antiretroviral therapy centre in Hayatabad Medical Complex Peshawar.

¶15. (U) Voluntary counseling and testing centers are already operating in Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar, Abbottabad, and in Kohat. If the proposed centers in Swat and Buner come to fruition and operate effectively, Dr. Rafiq hopes to establish centers in FATA. Medical centers in Mardan and Swabi, established for those internally displaced by the military operation in Malakand, would also be made part of the regular program.

Pakistan to Formally Enter Antarctic Treaty System

¶16. (U) In a meeting in early December the Cabinet of Pakistan moved to allow the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), backed by the Ministry of Defense, to complete all the formalities necessary to enter the Antarctic Treaty System and facilitate the participation of Pakistani scientists in common research programs. Becoming a member of the Treaty System is now necessary in order to launch an Antarctic expedition - an undertaking the Ministry of Defense says it is eyeing.

¶17. (U) Under the Antarctic Treaty System, acceding states are provided the co-operation and support of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCPs) in launching future expeditions to Antarctica, including training programs for scientists before they participate in joint research programs.

¶18. (U) Pakistan's initial Antarctic expeditions were carried out by the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) and MoST in co-operation with the Pakistani Navy. In 1990, Pakistan was elected an associate member of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), the Advisory Committee of the Antarctic Treaty. Pakistan previously established Jinnah Research Station in Antarctica in 1992. Pakistan has not returned to the continent since its 1990 and 1992 expeditions to Antarctica.

Patients Feel Budget Strain at Holy Family Hospital in Rawalpindi

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¶19. (U) In mid-December the Holy Family Hospital (HFH) of Rawalpindi ceased its practice of providing medicines and surgical disposables free of cost to outpatient cases. HFH will continue to provide medicines free of cost in inpatient cases as long as they are able. Hospital administrators said that a shortage of funds has forced them to cut the free medicine program.

¶20. (U) In fiscal year 2009-2010 HFH requested a budget of \$4.7 million, but the provincial government granted HFH only \$2.14 million for medicine and surgical disposables for inpatient cases. According to HFH chief, Dr. Syed Abid Hussain Shah, the hospital has already spent \$1.96 million of this budget on medicines and will keep the remaining \$180,000 in reserve to cover the cost of care for emergency room and labor ward patients. Shah added that the hospital has stores of medicine worth about \$1.2 million.

¶21. (U) The Board of Management of the Allied Hospitals has recommended to the GOP that HFH receive an additional \$1.4 million to be used toward the provision of free medicine. The funding request is still under review by the provincial government.

PARC Chairman Supports Organic Farming Practices

¶22. (U) At a briefing for the visiting Malaysian Minister for Agriculture, the Chairman of the Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC), Dr. Zafar Altaf, took the opportunity to stress the importance of organic farming practices in Pakistan. Among the practices he praised were use of bio-fertilizer, bio-pesticide and bio-herbicide. He added that root tuber crops, as well as beans,

rice and maize are being cultivated with saline water in Pakistan.

¶23. (U) During his briefing Dr. Altaf said PARC is moving toward dry aerobic rice culture, which yields a larger crop than flooded planting and saves about 38 percent of the water used in flooded planting methods. However, Dr. Altaf later mentioned to local Embassy staff that dry aerobic rice culture is a new technology for Pakistan and needs to be further evaluated in farmers' fields.

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\$2 Million for Pakistan Wetlands Program in 2010
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¶24. (U) Federal Secretary for Environment Kamran Lashari has budgeted approximately \$2 million for the Pakistan Wetlands Program in 2010. During his announcement of the funding, Mr. Lashari recognized the Wetlands Program as the Ministry of Environment's most successful project.

¶25. (U) The Pakistan Wetlands Program works to conserve the biodiversity of the nation's wetlands while also alleviating poverty in the region. The total budget for the project is \$12 million and is funded by several international partners and NGOs, including the Dutch Embassy, Global Environment Facility, United Nations Development Program, WWF and the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund.

¶26. (U) Richard Garstang, the Wetlands Program National Program Manager, presented the work plan for the coming year, which will focus largely on the implementation of the recently developed Pakistan Wetlands Policy, undertaking wetlands surveys to generate baseline data, enhancing the capacity of the stakeholders in wetlands conservation and management and raising general public awareness about wetlands.

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